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FQH 501

Assignment Question: *Talk about euthanasia from a maqasid perspective.*

Euthanasia (Qatl al-Rahma) In Islam

Euthanasia refers to the painless killing of a patient suffering from an incurable and painful disease, or in an irreversible coma.¹ In Arabic this is known was *qatl al-rahma*, which translates to ‘mercy killing.’ Euthanasia comes from the Greek word *euthanatos*. It is derived from the words *eu*, meaning ‘good,’ and *thanatos* meaning ‘death.’² As of this writing (Fall 2021) a case is making headlines of a 51-year-old mother who is choosing to die of euthanasia in Columbia. Martha Sepulveda is set to become Columbia’s first non-terminal patient to opt for euthanasia. Sepulveda considers herself a devout Catholic, and is quoted as stating euthanasia is a quote “*gift from God.*”³ In 1997, Colombia became the first country in Latin America to decriminalize euthanasia. It is also one of the only countries in the world where the procedure is legal. But until this year, it was only allowed in cases of the terminally ill. Columbia is a country with a Catholic majority making up 79% of the population. Catholics in Columbia are quickly changing their tune on euthanasia to “meet with the times.” With that being said, what is Islam’s stance on this controversial subject?

History of Euthanasia

¹ <https://www.lexico.com/definition/euthanasia>

² IBID.

³ Limon, “I’m at Peace”

Evidence suggests that euthanasia was practiced in ancient Greece and Rome. Hemlock was used as a means of hastening death. Euthanasia was also supported by famous philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, and Seneca the Elder.⁴ Euthanasia as a term was first used by Francis Bacon in his work *Euthanasia Medica*.⁵ Bacon a “militant atheist,”⁶ philosopher, and scientist has had a heavy influence on modern secular thought. These theories have carried on until present day as we shall see. Euthanasia in the Judeo-Christian traditions was always strongly opposed, most notably by Thomas Aquinas who argued that it contradicted our natural human instincts of survival.⁷

Euthanasia in Present Day

The first attempt at legalization of euthanasia in the United States was made by Henry Hunt of Ohio in 1906.⁸ Attempts to legalize euthanasia in the United States and abroad have continued since. We should also note that state sponsored euthanasia was infamously used by the Nazi regime in Germany in the 1930’s originating with the killing of a disabled infant,⁹ and continuing on the grounds of disabilities, religious beliefs, or individual values that did not agree with those of the state. This was Social Darwinism at its absolute worst.¹⁰

By the 1990’s “Dr. Death” Jack Kevorkian was making headlines for assisted suicides on more than one occasion. He was imprisoned for murder, and served an 8-year sentence. Dr. Jack Kevorkian was an atheist in belief. His father had come to the United States upon fleeing the

⁴ Active Euthanasia in Pre-Modern Society, p.206-207

⁵ A Concise History of Euthanasia, pg. 798-790

⁶ Francis Bacon: Painting a Godless World, pg.176

⁷ Euthanasia and Natural Law, pg. 190

⁸ A Duty to Kill, pg.610

⁹ The Origins of Nazi Genocide, Pg. 13

¹⁰ Social Darwinism is the theory that individuals, groups, and peoples are subject to the same Darwinian laws of natural selection as plants and animals, i.e., “survival of the fittest.” This led to theories of “racial superiority.”

Armenian genocide.¹¹ By the time he was 12 he believed that if there truly was a God then God would have prevented the Armenian genocide. This is the root of the Jack Kevorkian's atheistic beliefs. The age-old argument of '*how could God allow bad things to happen to good people?*'

Types of Euthanasia

Active Euthanasia

Active euthanasia refers to the intentional death of a terminally ill patient through action.¹² This could range from anything to lethal injection, to intentionally taking a patient off of life support. There are 3 types of active euthanasia: voluntary, non-voluntary, and involuntary. Voluntary takes place when a competent patient requests euthanasia. Non-voluntary euthanasia takes place when the patient is incapable of making the request. Examples of this would be a defective new-born, or a comatose adult. Involuntary euthanasia occurs when the patient wishes to live, but is killed, or allowed to die.

Passive Euthanasia

Passive euthanasia reflects a variety of circumstances a patient may face. Passive euthanasia refers to the act of withholding treatment from a terminally ill patient, thus allowing the patient to die.¹³ This type is sometimes also referred to as 'euthanasia by omission,' or 'negative euthanasia.' Forms of passive euthanasia are as follows:

- Withdrawing medical treatment from terminally ill patients
- Withholding medical treatment from terminally ill patients
- Medication that may hasten death of a terminally ill patient

¹¹ Carlson, "Jack Kevorkian Obituary"

¹² Marks, "Medical Definition of Active Euthanasia"

¹³ Brassington, "What Passive Euthanasia Is"

- Discontinuing life support systems
- Refusing medical treatment to terminally ill patients
- Do Not Resuscitate (DNR)

Euthanasia in Light of The Quran

When we turn to the 4th chapter in the Quran: *Sura an-Nisa*, we quickly find following:

“...and do not kill yourselves [or one another] ...” -Quran 4:29

This sentiment is echoed throughout the entirety of the Quran. God does not want us to kill ourselves, or each other, or face his wrath:

“...whosoever kills a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whosoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind.” -Quran 5:32

The verses of the Quran are very clear when it comes to intentionally ending the life of a human being. All human life is sacred:

“And do not take any human being’s life— (the life) which Allah has made sacred save with right (justice).” -Quran 17:33

In light of the Quran there is no justification for ending a life due to suffering:

“Allah does not tax any soul beyond that which it can bear.” -Quran 2:286

In Islam it is understood that the life of this world is only a test, and that death marks the transition between one state of existence to another. We find these beliefs throughout the Quran:

“Be sure that We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits of your toil, but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere”-Quran 2:155

“You shall certainly be tried and tested in your wealth and properties and in your personal selves... ” -Quran 3:186

Euthanasia in Light of The Sunnah

The traditions of the Prophet Muhammad(ﷺ) in this matter are just as clear as they are in the Quran. In multiple sahih hadeeth we hear that the character of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the Quran.¹⁴ He (ﷺ) in turn was the living embodiment of God’s words just as he was chosen to be God’s final prophet and messenger. We hold the Sunnah (or way) of the Prophet Muhammad(ﷺ) to be revelation in the same vein as the Quran.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is seen as the living Quran, and therefore his speech and action further clarifies the word of God in the noble text. Diseases, fatal or otherwise, are a test from God. These tests help to expiate sins, and ultimately bring a Muslim to paradise in the hereafter. This is evident from the following hadeeth of God’s messenger (ﷺ):

“When a Muslim is tried with a disease in his body it is said to the angel: Write for him the good actions which he used to do. If He (Allah) cures him, He (Allah) absolves him (of all sins); and if He (Allah) takes his life (as a result of the disease). He (Allah) forgives him and shows mercy upon him.”¹⁵

There is also the accumulation of rewards when it comes to illness. Abdullah ibn Masud reported that he visited the Prophet (ﷺ) while he was having high fever. He said “you have a

¹⁴ Sahih Muslim #746, Sunan an-Nasai #1601

¹⁵ Musnad Ahmed

*high fever. Is it because you will have a double reward?" He said "Yes. No Muslim is afflicted with any harm but that Allah will remove his sins for him as the leaves of a tree fall down."*¹⁶

Euthanasia in Light of Islamic Scholars

It is said that the scholars are the inheritors of the prophets, and in Islam we hold them in high regard. There are 5 stages in the Islamic call as mentioned by the scholar Ibn Qaiyim.¹⁷ The first 4 stages were carried out by the Prophet Muhammad(ﷺ). The 5th stage is to convey the message of Islam to the rest of the world until the end of time. This is to be done by the scholars. We have many examples from the scholars throughout Islamic history, due to space and time we will cover the most recent of rulings here.

In a statement made by the Islamic Fiqh Council, belonging to the Muslim World League, in October of 1986 the following rulings were reached:

1. It is not permissible to remove life support from a patient unless it is discovered that all brain functions, heart functions, or breathing have completely ceased. In this case the patient is ruling to have suffered enough irreversible damage to be considered legally dead.
2. So called "mercy killing" is not permissible from an Islamic Jurisprudential perspective. This would be considered murder, which is a major sin in Islam. Likewise withholding treatment to "reduce suffering" is also impermissible according to such guidelines.¹⁸

¹⁶ Sahih Bukhari #5223

¹⁷ A Biography of The Prophet of Islam, pg.156

¹⁸ Fiqhul Islami 3:807

CONCLUSION

In conclusion Islam's stance on euthanasia is very clear: it is an act of disbelief as well as an act of murder. How far should we take euthanasia? In William Shakespeare's famous play *Romeo & Juliet* the 2 main characters commit suicide due to the "*pain of heartbreak.*" In Japanese culture suicide has been viewed as a means of protecting one's honor.¹⁹ Atheism certainly has no limits. The Prophet(ﷺ) once said: "*From the words of the previous prophets that the people still find are: "If you feel no shame then do as you wish."*"²⁰ This belief is certainly true in Atheism, and even in such man-made cult religions such as that of 20th century occultist and magician Aleister Crowley's *Thelema*, whose motto was "*do as thou wilt.*" The name for the religion *Thelema* even translates to 'desire,' as in 'following your own desires,' in classical Greek.²¹ Imam Ahmed was beaten for his religious beliefs until he fainted. He endeavored, and chose to die another day. Martha Sepulveda is not terminally ill, and is choosing to die out of convenience. The Prophet Muhammad(ﷺ) once said: "*The world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever.*"²² To want live on *our* terms 100% of the time is the attribute of not only a disbeliever, but that of a small child. Even the most stone-cold of atheists cannot avoid their natural inclinations given by the creator. Comedian George Carlin was probably the most famous atheist in American pop-culture of the 20th century. Many of his comedic talks criticized religion and mocked the existence of God. Oddly enough, he once did a routine called "*don't pull the plug on me*" as part of his set. It was a short talk in which he rejected the concept of euthanasia and considered it superficial and "macho." Even the most famous of atheists had

¹⁹ Good Manner of Dying, pg. 49

²⁰ Sahih Bukhari # 3484

²¹ The Rabelaisian Mythologies, pg.90-91

²² Sahih Muslim # 2956

some *taqwa*,²³ and *fitrah*²⁴ given by the creator of the worlds! And in an update to the introduction: the clinic that agreed to perform Martha Sepulveda's euthanasia ended up reversing their decision.²⁵

Bibliography

²³ Arabic for 'fear of God,' *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, pg.61

²⁴ Arabic for 'moral compass;' natural inclination given by the creator; *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, pg. 406

²⁵ Subizar, "Clinic that Agreed"

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